

Great Ideas Aren't Enough

Fundraising tips by Regina Podhorin Zilinski

Regina Podhorin Zilinski is founder and president of The Leadership Group of Trenton, NJ, specializing in nonprofit fundraising. An Episcopalian, she is a member and faithful supporter of the FQA. In 1996, at the board's request, she wrote a sample grant proposal. [Excerpts from the introduction](#) follow this article.

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Often in the world of nonprofit fundraising we hear the lament about the great idea that didn't get funding. Regardless of the "worthy" cause, there are often disappointments when looking for financial support. Most of these disappointments have to do with the following:

- asking the wrong group/person (mistargeting)
- asking in the wrong way (failing to follow the funder's guidelines)
- having an inadequate/incomplete description of your "product" (marketing)

Whether you're looking for support for an art show, musical performance or theater event, private and public funders will be looking for more than a good idea. They will be looking to be convinced that your good idea has social merit (what difference will it make, for whom?), that you have the skills and expertise to pull it off and that they will get a positive response (press, reputation) as a result of the work. Below are some quick hints for successful fundraising:

1. Knowing who to ask

a. Make sure that the group or person you are asking for money has a reason to be interested in the work. Cold calling (or writing) in fundraising is a waste of time and money. Donor "prospecting" is a major fundraising activity. Research sources are the Internet, Foundation directories, state and local libraries and especially your friends and co-workers! It is a very small world and keeping up your networking makes it even smaller. Your co-worker's wife may just work for that corporation that gives special grants and she can get you to the right person, but not if you don't ask!

b. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Successful fundraisers use all available opportunities including: private donor solicitation, foundation proposals, corporate requests, local, county, state and federal government proposals and fund raising events. Please note that fundraising events typically have the smallest return on investment. Use them sparingly and focus them on "friend-raising" rather than fundraising. ALWAYS keep good lists of who attends your events. They are a great source for later solicitation.

2. Asking in the right way

a. Most foundations and public sources have specific guidelines for proposal content. Many will not even consider proposals that do not comply with their format. Call or write to ask for the format and an annual report. A number of foundations in New York/New Jersey have developed a common application form. You can find a copy, along with other great information, on the Internet at the [Foundation Center](#) and [The Grantsmanship Center](#).

b. Private donor solicitation is an art form when done well. Whether by mail or in person, make sure that you are asking the right person, that the right person is doing the asking and that your "story" is clear, crisp and ends in a specific request for a donation. Small local "teas" given by community friends can raise money quickly and easily, especially if the host/hostess invites friends and assumes responsibility for organizing the event. Whenever possible personalize either the story or the person making the request. Expect to take no for an answer sometimes and do it graciously. Don't forget to ask if they know of someone else who might be interested. Careful list building is hard work that always pays off in the end.

c. There are traditional good times to ask for private donations—Christmas, before and after April 15th (a reminder of the value of tax deductions) and important organizational anniversary years (5th, 10th, 25th etc.). If your story has a particular time or topic emphasis you may want to solicit funding before a related holiday. Many organizations make good use of Mother's Day, Valentine's Day etc. by linking those days to their organization's goals. I know of one organization that sent out personalized Thanksgiving Day cards to major donors and volunteers. The card did not ask for money but it was very noticeable and had a strong response in the form of increased donations. More than one person noted that it was the only Thanksgiving Day card they received.

3. Improving the appeal

Whether for written or in-person solicitation, make sure that your "story" contains the following:

a. **What difference will this work make?** Private and public funders are now looking for "outcomes". It is less important (although still of some value) to prove how many people will receive benefit. It is more important to concretely describe the benefit they will receive. What will the person seeing/experiencing your work gain by the experience? Think in terms of what they will be able to do or be after the experience that they could not before. Will they be able to act more peacefully? Will they be able to show compassion in an area that traditionally lacks compassion? Most nonprofits have a very hard time describing the difference they make. Many are afraid to commit to making a real difference. The reality is that those organizations who are

able to clearly express their outcomes are having far better success in attracting private and public funds.

b. For whom? Describe the population who will most benefit from your work and for whom your work is designed. This is your primary customer (the funder is providing a means to getting to the customer). Be clear about how you will access this primary customer. Saying that a program is designed for schoolchildren is different than laying out the plan for getting them to come. Do both!!

c. At what cost? Art organizations have an undeserved (sometimes!) reputation as lacking fiscal accountability. Put in the time to assess realistically how much it will (or does) cost to produce the work. Budget realistically and ask for an amount slightly higher than you think they can give (good donor prospecting will help you make an informed decision). Make a clear link between what it costs and the amount you are requesting. What will their money buy—scholarships for 7 children, one full production, costume rental for one night?

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[Our] commitment has led us to support much that is creative in public life, education, business, and concern for the oppressed. It has also led us to oppose practices and institutions that result in violence and exploitation in the world around us. —Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice (latest version)

....Historically, those skilled in the arts felt that their artistry was not a major force in Quaker life. Artists are stereotypically assumed to be self-seeking, using their art as an alternative form of self-expression. The Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts sees their work as self-giving through a special form of ministry that brings together their creativity and their passion for social justice...by becoming a professional society based on the Quaker testimonies of nonviolence, simplicity, equality, integrity, and community. These “testimonies” reflect a common set of deeply held, historically rooted attitudes and modes of living in the world. Through these testimonies, Friends strive for unity and integrity of inner and outer life, both in living with themselves and others, and in living in the larger world....

With violence growing at alarming rates, a society that is reeling from rampant consumerism, a frightening increase in racial/cultural separatism and a world where community is valued but inaccessible behind locked doors and alarm systems--these universal values are needed more than ever. Society is calling for a new way to share these values and an opportunity to discuss their meaning in individual lives....The Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts also hopes to provide alternatives and engage in a dialogue about solutions to these pressing social problems. It is this

act of creating a living testimony that will encourage others to experience differences and value the variety of creation, while breaking the isolation that these differences have caused.

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JOURNAL OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF QUAKERS IN THE ARTS

Issue #9, Spring 1998



COUNTERPOINT by Esther Mürer

The Arts in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice*

The new Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* is now out. It is a rich resource, the depths of which cannot be plumbed in a short time. Nevertheless I venture some preliminary observations on its treatment of the arts.

My impression so far is that, the extracts aside, the new *Faith and Practice* does not go beyond the 1972 version in acknowledging the validity of the arts as ministry. It would take quite some contortions to find a place for the arts in, for example, the section on "Concerns and Leadings" (p.65 ff).

The new version does make a passing reference to the value of arts as family recreation:

Family recreation should promote restoration, solidarity, and spiritual well-being; it should bring balance into life and contribute to wholeness of personality. Such recreation includes reading aloud, gardening, music, and arts and crafts as well as games and sports. All such activities develop fellowship within the familyRecreational activities should stress cooperation and inclusiveness, and should resist the materialism of our culture. (p 71)

By contrast, the 1972 version treats recreation as a separate topic, not subsumed under family life:

Simplicity directs the individual to choose those forms of recreation that rest and build up the body, that refresh and enrich mind and spirit. One should consider the proper expenditure of time, money and strength, the moral and physical welfare of others as well as oneself. Healthful recreation includes games, sports and other physical exercise; gardening and the study and enjoyment of nature; travel; books; the fellowship of friends and family; and the arts and handicrafts which bring creative self-expression and appreciation of beauty. Recreations in which one is a participant rather than merely a spectator are particularly beneficial. (p 20)

Whatever one may think of the change in emphasis, both versions represent a decided advance over the kind of thing one finds in 19th-century disciplines:

1806: As our time passeth swiftly away, and our delight ought to be in the law of the Lord; it is advised that a watchful care be exercised over our youth, to prevent their going to stage-plays, horse-races, music, dancing, or any such vain sports and pastimes....

1873 (Orthodox): We would renewedly caution all our members against indulging in music, or having instruments of music in their houses, believing that the practice tends to promote a light and vain mind....It becomes us to be living as strangers and pilgrims on earth, seeking a better country, and to be diligently using [our time] for the great end for which it is lent to us..., and not in vain amusements or corrupting pleasures, but striving that 'whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do all to the glory of God...'

....all, apparently, except making music. In fairness it should be pointed out that Quakers didn't have a monopoly on this attitude. A Universalist hymnal published in the same year as the last quotation contains a hymn with the lines:

Will ye play, then, will ye dally
With your music and your wine?
Up! it is th'Almighty's rally:
God's own arm hath need of thine!

Here is a task for present and future generations of Quaker artists: to bring our religious community to the point of realizing that arts as ministry is worth making a corporate statement about.

And yet I realize with some awe that the *form of Faith and Practice* itself has evolved in a direction which makes room for intimations and concerns which are in advance of the general leading. The section of extracts from Friends' writings--originally limited to corporate minutes--has in this century come to include quotations from the writings of individual Friends.

We must acknowledge the danger that this trend may be a function of our increasing corruption by the ideology of individualism. At the same time we can marvel at how a native Quaker form has organically evolved a way of accommodating new life growing up through the cracks in the Quaker sidewalk.

Oddly enough, while the extracts in the 1972 version had nothing specifically *about* the arts, the sections on belief, the scriptures, worship and ministry, brotherhood, the individual and the state, death and bereavement, and nature all included extracts in poetic form--by John Greenleaf Whittier, Kenneth Boulding, and Mary Hoxie Jones.

The new version, by contrast, has no poetry at all. But it does have the topic "art" in the index, listing the two extracts reproduced above--one from a statement by FQA's own Janet Mustin at the opening of the new crafts studio at Pendle Hill in 1992, and the other from John Ormerod Greenwood's classic Swarthmore Lecture, *Signs of Life*. And powerful extracts they are.

The new *Faith and Practice* will take--and richly reward--a lot of living with. Much as I long to see more space given to recognizing the spiritual value of the arts, I suggest that an essential standard, without which any amount of talk *about* the arts would be meaningless, is the one articulated by T.S. Eliot in his essay "The Idea of a Christian Society:"

Good prose cannot be written by a people without convictions.

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Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* (1997):

Extracts on the Arts

Extract #169:

We all know about the traditional antagonism between Quakerism and the arts. At Swarthmore College, when I was there in the forties, there was no studio art offered. The Quaker emphasis was definitely on the social sciences, and the feeling was strong that one should be expected to contribute to society in a social-activist kind of way. Nevertheless, I aspired to be an artist; I also joined the Quaker meeting there. That these two avenues were incompatible was obvious by the clichés that were then available concerning Art and Quakerism. The artist was a proverbially selfish person, bound to do his or her own thing at the expense, if necessary, of society. He or she was given to exhibitionist promotion and passionate emotional extremes, and offered a product that was suspiciously commercial or superfluously decorative.

The Quaker, on the other hand, was geared to the needs of society and ready to offer his or her own life for the good of others; was not going to waste time in trivial pursuits, and was solidly grounded, with an emotional and productive life very much under control.

Well, my ideas have come a long way since then. This was all a very exterior view of the outside from the outside. What I missed at that stage of my life was that the artist and the Quaker are on the same internal journey. Each is seeking a relationship with the Divine, and each is seeking a way to express that relationship. There are just many different ways of expressing it. For many, the path to the Self has to be entered by way of the arts, whether or not we are gifted in that field. That doesn't seem to matter. As St. Paul says: If we have not love, we are as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And for many of us, the pathway to love is through the arts.... The process of working with and forming material things can lead beyond them to the spiritual, and shape of clay or colors of paint can be a window into another world.

—Janet Mustin, 1992 (#169, not #240 as per the author index)

Extract #282:

There are few human activities in which perfection is possible; for in most things the human limitations of knowledge, time, energy, skill, and motive impede us; only in the arts do they work for us, so that we can truly say of certain works of music, poetry, painting, sculpture and architecture that we can neither wish nor imagine them otherwise. When we find this degree of perfection and are able to respond to it, they become in sober truth a revelation of the divine in the sense that Jesus was: human yet complete.

—John Ormerod Greenwood, 1978 (#282)

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In Search of Quaker Esthetics

by Chuck Fager



Dear Friends

FQA is an exciting group to be part of. Every time we gather in our board meetings, or brainstorm projects far beyond our present capacities and budgets, I feel as if we are helping write an important new chapter in Quaker history.

After almost three centuries of being more or less against art in practically all its forms, The Religious Society of Friends has now more or less agreed, in that crabwise evolutionary way we often resolve such things, that the arts can be a vehicle for minding the Light and bearing our testimonies.

But having more or less decided that Quaker stuff can be said rightly through the arts, we are just beginning, I think, to explore the matter of (to paraphrase Margaret Fell paraphrasing Fox) "What Can We Say?" Is there some distinctively Quaker flavor or message or accent that we can identify, cultivate and celebrate?

This thought was very much with me a couple of weeks back when I visited the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Large segments of what I saw there—I think especially of the French Rococo furniture—was just so unrelievedly ugly, with lumps of the gaudy piled on top of heaps of the overdone, all to highlight the exaggerated, evidently more in an effort (so it seemed to me) to display wealth and status than to achieve any recognizably artistic purpose, that I found myself thinking of the studied plainness of most of the Quaker meeting rooms I know as not merely different, but quite handsome by contrast. Not only handsome, but expressive. Expressive of what?

This question stayed with me as we walked through other galleries. It soon became clear that mere unadornedness wasn't what it was about; else the minimalist stuff would have been more appealing; but too much of that seemed, not plain, but merely empty. And besides, we saw some Tiffany stained glass, mostly of botanical arrays or landscapes, which were very elaborate, and made originally for the wealthy, but which I found very lovely, say what I might.

Whenever I think about this there's always Edward Hicks in the back of my mind, with his Peaceable Kingdom paintings, which are at once "naive" and very accomplished, and both "simple" in theme but (to me at least) haunting and rich.

And I also think of the sculpture of Sylvia Judson Shaw, she of the well-known Mary Dyer tableau; she did many other pieces, of animals and children, some of which are breathtaking, yet there is also a simplicity to them as well....

Turning to written work, I still remember when I first heard the poet Henry Taylor read his work, just after he had received the Pulitzer Prize. I'd never heard of him, and the works he read were nonreligious, and yet the longer I listened to this stranger, the more I felt I recognized something in his work, something Quakerly; and sure enough, he was soon identified as, not only a Friend, but the clerk of Goose Creek Meeting in Virginia, and, I later learned, the fifth in a direct line of descendants to hold that same post.

I spotted his work as "Quake-ish;" yet one would never have confused Henry Taylor with Whittier.

Am I just imagining, or is there some thing, or things, which could be pointed to as features of a genuinely Quaker esthetic (or, in line with Quaker pluralism, esthetics)? It is still very early to know, or be able to guess. But I think we are on the way. FQA, in its stumbling, one-small-step-at-a-time way, is part of this exploration. That is a big part of what makes me grateful and excited to be its new Clerk.

Peace,

Chuck Fager

Graphic at top: Mary Loomis Wilson (1907-1999). Beach scene. Acrylic, ca. 1976.

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